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The Leadership of Lyndon Johnson

Mike Mansfield 1903-2001

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September 14, 1959

STATEMENT OF SENATOR MIKE MANSFIELD (D., MONTANA)

THE LEADERSHIP OF LYNDON JOHNSON

Mr. President:

We are close to the hour of adjournment. Before the hour strikes, I wish to record certain personal sentiments. If I may have the indulgence of the Senate I shall try to be brief.

Last January, each of us came into this Congress with certain high expectations. We hoped--each of us--that certain actions would be pursued by this government. Perhaps, too, we hoped--each of us--that certain actions would not be pursued. The record is now almost complete. Looking back over it, I am sure that few Members will be fully satisfied with the results in terms of January's expectations. Some actions were taken of which some of us do not approve. Other Members will feel shortchanged because the Congress failed to act as they did approve.

It is easy enough in these circumstances to hold the leadership responsible for disappointments. And may I say that it is right and proper to hold the leadership responsible. Leadership, after all, has its duties and risks. In this government it is the servant not the master.

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But what we need to ask ourselves in this respect is this question. What part of the leadership of this government are we holding responsible for our disappointments?

Leadership in this government, as Senators know, is a divided and diffused function. It lies, first of all, in the Presidency. It lies, too, in the majority and minority leaders in both Houses of Congress. It lies in the Committees and their chairmen in both Houses of Congress. It lies in individual Members.

The structure of leadership in this nation has evolved over a century and a half of our history and I do not propose to debate its efficacy in the closing hours of the first session of the 86th Congress. I stress its divided and diffused nature, however, because that is relevant, highly relevant to what I am about to say. I stress it because I am trying to put into perspective the dedicated work of the leader of Senate Majority Party, the Senator from Texas (Mr. Johnson).

The distinguished majority leader did not create the system of leadership under which we function in this government. He did not give the Presidency its enormous prestige and influence with Members of Congress or its veto-power over the acts of Congress. The Majority Leader did not create the Committee structure of the Senate nor the procedures of the Congress under which we legislate. He did not create the powers of individual Members of the Senate. All of these are elements, highly significant elements, in the structure of leadership in this government.

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The scope which falls to the majority leader of the Senate is proscribed and limited by these other segments of leadership. The limits, I may add, are especially sharp when the Administration is controlled by the opposite party.

It is easy to carp at the leadership of any man. But I know of no man who is less deserving of carping criticism than the Senator from Texas. He is fair-minded and he is large-minded. He has led his party and the Senate, within the limits of the possible, in a responsible and progressive fashion. He has been reasonable with this Administration at all times and particularly when the overriding interests of the nation have been involved. It will be well, Mr. President, if all of us--democrats and republicans alike--ask ourselves have we done as well with our committee and individual responsibilities of leadership? It will be well, too, for the Administration to ask itself the same question.

One may regard the record of the actions of this government during the past nine months--and, I repeat, it is a record for which the Administration and the Congress bear joint responsibility--one may regard it as good, bad or indifferent, depending largely on one's predisposition. As far as the Senator from Montana is concerned, he is satisfied that it is a far better record from the point of view of the people of the United States because of the participation of the distinguished majority leader in making it.

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The proof of constructive leadership, Mr. President, does not lie in vetoes sustained or vetoes overridden. Much less does it lie in volume of legislation. I know of only one way to measure the quality of leadership in this government. There is one yardstick and it applies to all sources of leadership--in the Administration as well as in the Congress. How effectively are entrusted powers used by an elected official within the scope of his functions to preserve the basic unity of the nation and to advance the common welfare? Against that yardstick, the work of Lyndon Johnson in this first session measures high, Mr. President, very high. He has helped this government to achieve much and he has laid the groundwork for greater achievements in the future. His work is in the finest traditions of the nation, as regards dedicated and responsible leadership. As a democrat and an American, I am thankful that the party and the nation is served by a man of his calibre. He has given a great deal of himself for the nation and I did not want this session to close without this acknowledgment of his contribution.

September 14, 1959

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